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FUGITIVE PIECES/PINK

BY

JO DAGON

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

MFA PHOTOGRAPHY PROGRAM
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Elliott Rubenstein, Chairperson
Associate Professor
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences

Judy Levy
Adjunct Professor
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences

Lawrence (Judd) Williams
Professor
School of Fine Art R.I.T.

Jeff Weiss, Technical Advisor
Assistant Professor
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences

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DEDICATION

My thesis and show are dedicated to my late husband, Ron who died before he could experience its completion. His enthusiasm and support for my work carried me through some difficult hurdles, and even as he was extremely ill several months prior to the show, he would say, "We are going to have a good show". He died January 22, 1989 four months before show time. It is to his memory and incredible support that I dedicate this thesis.

There are others who held me up during the aftermath of his death. Theirs was a considerable support in knowing that I wanted to go on with the show, in giving aesthetic advice, physical, emotional, and monetary help. They were there when I needed them. Some came from long distances and gave time when they were working on projects of their own that demanded attention.

To the following people I am greatly indebted: To Erin Dagon for her creation of the "Good Witch of the North" pink dress; to Marie Dagon who traveled from Anchorage, Alaska to Rochester, New York to help paint and staple and cook and to organize; to Mike Dagon who called often to ask, "How are things going?", to Guy Montagna, Karen Montagna, Hali Marrotta, Greiton Figuerora, JoAnn Dellaposta, Bill and Gloria Laemmel, Tom Enesey, Lisa Niedzwiecki, for their hard

labor and sewing, building, painting, glueing, and helping with the installation, the cooking, and transport of the show from my apartment to the gallery; to Judy Levy, Gordon Bleach and Zwelethu Mthethwa for holding me up during Ron's death - the long ordeal at the hospital and the services and afterwards. To Barbara Metzger, John Mazzuto, Liz and Don Carter, Mike Dagon, and my sister Rose Marotta for monetary support that was used to buy supplies, rent and groceries and purchase necessary items for the show; and, Ronni Ritter Sept for her visit and telephone calls that located the pink carpet and for being there. Also to Sam Kimura and Bob Hewitt for their visit from Anchorage, the wonderful cooking that both Sam and Tony Wang did when they were in town; to Laura Cann for excellent therapeutic advice before and after Ron's death; to my board and my chairperson, Elliott Rubenstein for understanding the circumstances and giving me the freedom to decide the best route to follow - for their time and guidance. To Ann Spenny, JoAnn Dellaposta, and Ann McAllister for including me in their lives when I needed emotional support. To Judy Natal and Judy Levy for their continuing aesthetic advice and questioning which helped me to focus on important issues within my show; for Judy Levy's invention of "fret spray" that was used to motivate me in times of distress; to Jeff Weiss for showing me how to cut boards, make frames and do the technical, with conversations about image making; to Ed Durrill, Rich Fahey, and Gene Nieminen for going above and beyond in helping me in the

gallery; to Gene and Ed for photographing parts of the show included in this thesis; and, to Ken White the department chairperson, who throughout the two years I was a graduate student at R.I.T. opened up his home for student meetings and gatherings in an environment that was conducive to fostering our growth.

And, after the show when I moved from Rochester, New York back to my home in Alaska, I was given a great deal of help packing hundreds of pounds of books, household items, and my show into an old school bus which survived the trip up the dusty, potholed, mud ridden Alaska Highway. Why they did not collapse in the process of loading the bus, I will never know. They were an enormous help and I will always remember them. They are Jessica Loy and Tom Santelli. The bus driver and co-pilot also deserve a thousand salutations for driving the four-thousand eight-hundred miles to Anchorage and unloading the bus.

To all these wonderful people, I want to give my most heartfelt and grateful thanks. Without them I would not have been able to sustain the energy in order to complete my show in the time frame I did and write this thesis. They were my "backbone". Thank you all very very much.



Bus Driver and co-polit: Tom Enesy and Zwelethu Mthethwa
Haines Junction, Alaska; June, 1989

INTRODUCTION

Ever since I heard of the inclusion of feminism in describing the situation of women and its use in the visual media, I began to question some of my own stages of evolution. This came about gradually over a period of years. I often felt fragmented as a wife and mother, and read a great deal about women's roles in our society. Society had definite established "rules" to ways in which women were supposed to act. I often questioned these "rules" and how they might have affected me, but I accepted the conditions. I followed the codes handed to me by both family and media, textbook and art history. Much stemmed from the powerful patriarchal culture in which I live.

It was not until I was in the graduate program at RIT and took a gender course that I felt a need to look further into this issue. As I read more, and was able to see art done by women who had similar concerns, I began to question more of the female roles that had importance in my life. I also wondered how these roles operated as barriers to my functioning as a person. If these were connected to myths from the past that were restricting me, I wanted to know more about them.

An article I had run across while studying these issues gave me more incentive to continue exploring. This article, by Sam Keen, in the magazine Psychology Today suggested that the entire legacy and burden of cultural and familial myths

ultimately comes to rest on the individual. He says that each of us is a composite of many stories, old and new, but unless we try to become conscious of these personal myths, we are in danger of being dominated by them.¹

So, it was from these components, woven and layered into my conscious over the years that I wanted to begin separating out some of the fragments. I began by looking at several major role models that may have defined my thinking; those that could have affected me as wife, mother, artist. It was in this context that I wanted to place my show.

To try and articulate these issues in my artwork I chose to use visuals of women that were created by men - isolating female personas as seen by men. I felt they had controlled the visual media for a long time, and their thinking was a heavy influence on my concepts of self as a woman. Thus in revising historic male art (and some recent), I thought I could recreate the personas according to my own version. I would then be able to associate closely with certain myths about feminine roles as portrayed by these male artists.

I appropriated their visuals from sources such as comic books, sculpture, art history texts, magazines, Disney children's books and film. Identification with these models was on the basis of a kinship that I had felt with them in some way. These were the images that seemed to have implanted themselves into my unconscious at various stages of

¹ Sam Keen, "The Stories We Live By", Psychology Today, December, 1988, p. 45.

my growth when I was most receptive to them; also, in different ways, many of these attachments were the ones that became more of a distraction and a hindrance to my way of functioning than an expansion.

As I created the female characters while working on my show, I discovered that many of their personas offered me a security and an identity. This was the "glue" that kept me within a place in my culture. Some were helpful, others not. Those that were not, created what Sam Keen refers to as a type of selective blindness - a narrowness and rigidity of thinking, on my part, that bound me to a position, a role that I knew I was uncomfortable in, but did not, at the time know why.²

It encourages us to follow "the faith of our fathers", to imitate the way of the culture's heroes (and heroines), to repeat the formulas and rituals exactly as they were done in the old days. Such conservatism can work so long as no radical change is necessary for survival. Confronted with a novelty . . . the mythic mind is at loss. It tries, as Marshall McLuhan said, to walk into the future looking through a rear-view mirror.³

It was this "rear view mirror" I needed to look into first before I could begin to go forward.

To transmit my thought the visual, in the strongest possible way, I set the female personas, with a sense of humor, in an environment where people could react with them.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

I dressed in "mythical" costume, and invited people at the opening to do the same. I wanted the audience to be able to walk among the figures and photographs in a contained space so they would interrelate with the mythologies I created. I knew if they could enter into my world of myths they would further identify with them; if they could sit and talk in the same space dressed in costume an even closer bond might occur. Initially, I wasn't clear as to how the space and costuming would work. I proceeded on gut feelings. It was also important that the figures project an outward appearance of humor. When I gave each role its substance I wanted this apparent humor to turn in on itself; this I hoped would expose the core of the myth. The outward humor was used to allow people to enter into the dialogue more easily (in a self affirming way) while it functioned as a coping mechanism for any distress I would experience when certain myths were revealed.

The final show was presented in the form of an installation which became the symbol of my world (figs. 2-7). The pink carpet that tied the room together was a symbol of femininity. This world, inhabited by painted inflatable toys - female personas (fig. 2); large photo constructions, sequined shoes, teacups, mirrors, and flowered lamps exemplified my association with stereotypical roles.

So in setting-up the show and using these visuals, I was repeating some of the formulas of my past. In an attempt to test these roles of tradition first hand, I could

conscientiously "re-live" them. This requirement would allow me to begin studying the myths to see if they had any redeeming qualities before proceeding to let them go - or keep them - if I could.

Fugitive Pieces/Pink told the story of the many roles that were contained in one person - me. The room became the inside of my head, the home of my mythical characters with all their humor, confusion, pain and hopes for transformation

" We need to reinvent ourselves continually, weaving new themes into our life narratives, remembering our past, revising our future, re-authorizing the myths by which we live. We play out the story plot buried in the unconsciousness, to change we have to edit our mythology."

Sam Keen, "The Stories We Live By"⁴

⁴ Ibid.

PROCESS

Ron

During my second year at RIT my husband, Ron died. When we left Alaska together in September, 1988, we were aware that he could have a recurrence of cancer (he had been diagnosed that summer), but we did not expect it to reappear so soon. According to his doctor, he was supposed to be in remission for at least two years. That November he became seriously ill again. In January he died.

While he was still mobile I was able to attend classes and work on sketches and the beginnings of my show. By Thanksgiving he was in terrible pain. Over the Christmas break his health deteriorated rapidly. My concern was his care. We went to the cancer center, at first, every week and then every other day for treatment. We went on as if "tomorrow" would bring change and he would feel better; however, that did not happen. I miss him very much.

I felt agony and nothingness. I stopped work on my thesis for awhile. Some very good supportive people helped me through the painful crisis. Because of them I was able to pull myself together to go on - to stay in Rochester and continue my schooling and thesis work.

When I returned to work, I did some images of Ron and myself to incorporate his memory into the installation. I ended up with a small series of images that were slathered in black

paint. One image (widow?) survived, later made into a photograph - a hooded character without a face (fig. 11) that would become part of Bosch's House.

Materials

My interest in materials and processes had been long standing. I was familiar with mixed media techniques so I was drawn to work with anything that fit my ideas, from photographs and chicken feathers to toys and paint. The more elements I had available the happier I seemed to be. Even though I did not always have knowledge of materials I tried them anyway.

During the fall of my second year at RIT, I filled several sketchbooks with notes and drawings of fictional cartoon-like characters. Based on these drawings I made models using 8 x 10 inch photographs. To these I added objects, such as tree branches and miniature chickens; for objects I did not have, I substituted drawings. As I worked on these and added more sketches to the book, my ideas began to take shape. The mainstay of my drawings pointed to a fantasy room with large scale photographic combinations and female characters (figs. 2-7).

Inflatables

My first idea was to construct these characters as large collages; so again, I went the route of mock-up model. Using Picasso's Girl In A Mirror as a guide, I made a collage portrait of myself, screaming. Frustrated, having worked on this for several days without success, I set it aside. Earlier in the week I had discarded an inflatable toy.⁵ Not enthused with the collage and yet wanting to continue with the Girl In A Mirror, I took the inflatable toy from the garbage and began painting (animation paints) and drawing (pastels) on it copying the Picasso collage that I had done earlier. When finished the inflatable felt right. The form, weight and three dimensionality better expressed what I was trying to do within an installation (fig. 33).

Constructions

Use of materials with the inflatables, once I did the second, then the third, were easily applied. However, I also wanted to use large photographic collages, and these presented problems because of size and the nature of their construction.

⁵ The toy was a gift: Hateable Inflatable, made in Taiwan.

They were time consuming and often frustrating. I had little skill in carpentry and my knowledge of necessary steps to put them together was minimal; it was one matter to work freely with model photo-collage mock-ups of glue, staples and scotch tape, and quite another to bring to bear a similar image on a six-foot plywood structure.

There were often so many questions about tool use, materials and putting it all together that I had serious thoughts (fantasizing a budget) to contract a carpenter to make this all happen. I was fortunate that my late husband, Ron had the foresight to carry a large toolbox with him to Rochester. Also, with much help from Jeff Weiss with construction (Jeff helped me build the frames that would support the large photographs) and in pointing me in the right direction with tools and materials, I was able to do much of the minor work myself. I learned to operate a skill saw, a drill and to miter corners. During one stage of the project I was cutting threaded rods (used to bolt the photographs to a backing) with a dull hacksaw blade, much like an ancient Hottentot woman cutting down a tree with a flat rock. Jeff suggested I buy a new saw-blade.

As I finished backing the three to four foot photographs and they were ready to be installed on the large frame according to the mock-up, I wanted to see how they would look before bolting them into place. This led me to devise an awkward system of taping nylon rope to them and then tacking them to the ceiling. They all came down, crashing to the floor. I decided this was a waste of time so I worked directly looking at the

small model while I fitted and bolted the large cut-outs to the frame without further consideration.

Securing the large photographs onto a backing of gator board and attaching them to the frames took longer than I anticipated. When I began I had in mind to create five large constructions using this method. After doing the first, I realized that I would be lucky to create number two in the time frame I had. I found that in working this way, I would need about a year to make this many. The first had taken two months to complete.

Incidents

The further I got into production, the more I knew what I wanted to do with the installation. More specific work to put into the space came to mind. Since I wanted to have the show on the date I had set the previous year, I had to put some new ideas on hold so I could concentrate on finishing those I had in progress. Time was a big factor.

It seemed the closer show time approached, the less time was cooperating. There were two simple items I needed to purchase that did not require a tight calendar schedule: one was 2,000 marbles, the other a small remote controlled car. The time I thought I needed to purchase these: four hours; the time it took to purchase these: three days.

The craft shop where I often went to buy odds-and-ends for the installation was where I went to get the marbles. While an old man, who worked in the shop, was getting the marbles for me from a big box, it broke. Twenty-thousand marbles rolled out. I waited a long time for him to get help. Then he had to figure how to count the marbles I wanted so I could pay for them. I don't know what redeeming experience goes with this many marbles on a craft shop floor except that it was unusual and an unexpected delay. I was in a hurry and the event kept me in place for a long time.

The problem with the car: Most little cars of the type I wanted were made to perform at high speeds, and almost every hobby shop in Rochester based their reputation on speedy cars. I could not find one that operated at a continuous five-miles-per-hour. Shop owners and salespeople also looked at me in a funny way. I was feeling slightly deranged and was about to delete the project, but it was an important element in my show where Wonder Woman escapes in a car (fig. 35). So I could not give up. On the third day I found a hobby shop with friendly, helpful people who believed in slow speed. They showed me how to bypass the speed mechanism by putting a finger in the trigger control. A simple solution.

The next day my real car broke. My show was in three days and I had a lot to do.

Costumes

The costuming came about spontaneously. My family had a long standing tradition of dressing in fantasy costume for fun. The occasion didn't need a special holiday to mark it; "spaghetti night" was a good reason.

Before I left Alaska to return to Rochester in the fall of 1988, there was a costume party at our house honoring "Italian Night" (another version of "spaghetti night"). Caesar held court in the living room, a gondolier poured wine in the kitchen, an opera singer bellowed on the front porch; and, on the back porch, there was a mock mafia murder. I was dressed as the Godmother.

People did not censor their behavior as they normally would, and feelings were expressed openly and with gusto (the wine helped). This led me to believe that if I invited people to come to the opening of my show in fantasy dress, a similar openness would occur. I also thought that an event such as this would allow others to respond to my personal mythologies with a greater sense of belonging - that a greater human experience would happen.

So when show-time approached, I included, with the invitation, a small note inviting everyone to come to the opening in the fantasy dress of their choice. This event was not structured except for the invitations and my own costuming planned months before.

I was Glenda, The Good Witch of the North, dressed in a long pink gown studded with stars and snowflakes, complete with magic wand (fig. 1,8).⁶ Others who came in costume responded to me rather than to a sense of being part of the show itself. There was a forest princess, a cowboy, dilettants, a Hungarian prince, a housewife with an apple pie, masks in the likeness of people who wore them, a tie made of pink carpet remnants with a dancing ballerina tie clasp, a multitude of pink bows worn on hats, arms, and as headbands. There was even a Hawaiian princess and an actress from a bygone era.

The biggest surprise, to me, was my quiet, usually conservative son, Guy. When he entered the room he was flanked, on each arm, by two striking young women: my niece, Hali and my daughter-in-law, Karen. They wore matching mini-dresses covered with pink pom-poms. Their eye-lids and lashes were covered with pink sparkling glitter. Guy was costumed in a bright pink suit, including pink shoes and socks, and carried an extraordinary cigarette holder from which hung a pink plastic heart. When I asked him who he was, he said, "A wealthy art critic" (fig. 1).

He gave his unique critique of the opening and the show. For he, Karen, Hali and the others who shared a different self for several hours, their fantasies projected another ego. The space in the gallery became a theatre within the installation - an unrehearsed and spontaneous place for people to share their

⁶ From the movie, The Wizard of Oz.

fantasies, their logic, or whatever else came to mind at the time.⁷

This may not have been a logical or a rational way to approach my myths, their myths, or even to connect this to my thesis. It was an experiment in order to open up the environment to a playful sharing affair. Besides enhancing the opening, and encouraging a great deal of fun, this led me to think of more ways I might associate personal myths with costuming. This was a situation where we could let go without pretense and connect a common thread within ourselves. A great deal more can be done to study the complexities of our mythological heroines (and heros) and monsters through inviting people to participate in an open spontaneous environment such as this.

⁷ Paul Klee is an artist who was interested in exposing hidden aspects of character through his study of the theatre. In much of his mature work he gave his figures artificial theatrical guises posing the question: Which was truer, the actual character seen in a person or the mask or costume that the person was wearing? The Klee image in my show, an inflatable figure (fig. 12), was taken from one of his drawings that depicts the emergence of a face growing out of a web of lines. The whimsy and humor are only surface effects with a hope of discovering an underlying view of character and the many facets that contribute to making up our behaviors.
Margaret Plant. Paul Klee: Figures and Faces. (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, . 1978),
p. 55.

VIDEO TRANSCRIPTION

On the following pages I have entered a transcription of the video that was done during the thesis defense on May 4, 1989. This transcription further describes the concept of Fugitive Pieces/Pink and includes the participation of the audience.

JO: The personas in my show span a period of time from the Renaissance to the present; and, most of the figures have been taken from an art historical context - except for my self portraits. For me they are representations that depict different roles that women have been put into, from the male perspective, throughout the history of art. Although Wonder Woman is not particularly from an art historical source, coming from the comic books, she was someplace in history that affected me - so I am talking about western society here and roles that I have identified with.

I found myself picking these pieces [from the historic] by intuition, basically, and looking at them I began to think that these were myths that governed my head over a long period of time. I wanted to find some meaning in all these bits and pieces, in all this fragmentation that essentially controlled my behavior; and, then as I began to

look more, I saw that these myths became apparent (I began to see more clearly how they were a part of me).

Marilyn Monroe (the desirable woman) (fig.22):
When I was sixteen, seventeen, there was a strong identification with this figure - I think many of these things were in effect (because of her great popularity as a beautiful movie star). Now, because I am older and am not as beautiful as I used to be (oh's from the audience), and as I look back - (Judy Natal is making tich, tich, tich sounds) (laughter from the audience) - from the perspective of this myth, I know I reflected it.

Medusa (the horrible mother) (fig. 23): As a mother, in this role, and going through certain stages in my life, and in my children's lives, I felt I was put in this position. I reflect on this also.

Snow White (the prince will save me) (fig.37):
And also the Snow White Syndrome.⁸

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Is Cinderella here?

JO: No. Cinderella did not materialize.
The Unborn Child (fig. 13) (this figure is passed to the audience to view): . . . has a little

⁸ Betsy Cohen, The Snow White Syndrome. (Macmillan, New York, 1986)

"window" in her face and a butterfly inside; the butterfly signifying hope is still hidden within the figure. This relates to the butterfly from the story of the children of Terezin⁹ where the butterfly stood for a semblance of hope. The unborn woman, in this case, has another semblance of hope.

AUDIENCE QUESTION (referring to another figure of a self portrait): Jo, is there a reason you painted yourself in black and white instead of color?

JO: Yes. As I look at all these personas with color that is bouncing back to me (the other figures in the show); and, in looking at all the fragmentation I experienced, I saw myself in black and white (and shades of gray). That is also true of the figure here (Manet) (fig. 7,18,19) which reflects in the mirror. I wanted her to see herself in black and white and others to see her in color. Her portrait appears on both the front and back of the same inflatable. She sees her reflection in the mirror as black and white. On the reserve side her "twin" identity (drawn in

⁹ Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezin Concentration Camp. I never saw another butterfly.

color) faces the audience. They see a formed identity.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Expound on the black and white issue.

JO: This can be seen as unborn color, as a state of unformed identity; because, I think parts of us are unformed, and it is not only women, this is true of all of us. We often have so many things thrown at us in different role situations as to what we should be, that we don't know or realize our true identity.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: I found this house fascinating (the house with the roosters, teacups, and swing) (fig. 4,6,20). Can you tell us something about it?

JO: For years I have lived in a 'house' situation - I shaped this room to resemble that kind of structure - and there were so many times when things happened to me with and within the house that I literally cut it apart . . . when I did this piece I saw a house - a house in which I spent summers with my cousins; it is (from) an old box-camera photograph; I liked the image. I saw it as a situation I was in during a past time and also one that I am in now. In my life I have lost two

husbands (death); I have a house in Alaska; and, the situation here . . . I was balancing mortgages and rent, and working to survive in Rochester (while my husband was ill). I felt everything was falling apart around me. So in one sense this house is falling apart (perhaps an indication of my situation due to my husband's recent death); and, in another sense this piece is very stable as if it is holding everything together - the teacups show this as if to say everything is o.k.

(The home has traditionally been a woman's place, a place where I cared for my children, a protective place. I am determined to hold this home together because of this. This is probably why I placed the teacups, and figures in a well balanced way. I think this balance is saying that tradition can not be upset without losing one's stability. To another degree, it signifies my tenacity to hang onto tradition. In this situation, I needed the balance to keep the home intact even though it was going through much change and upheaval. I fear letting go of tradition and the safety of this place.)

About the self portrait on the swing (suspended above this house) (fig. 5,6,34): I am out on a limb. I found myself, as I was working on this piece, bumping into the swing and knocking the figure to the floor. I discovered that this portrait of me always fell on it's feet (I knock this figure from the swing; because of the way it

is weighted, it lands upright . . . on it's "feet").

AUDIENCE: Laughter.

JO: . . . all these figures . . . are weighted this way - they always pop back up.

AUDIENCE: Jo, did you get comfort, in terms of religious iconography on that piece (figs. 2,11) (H. Bosch and the cloaked figure of the Virgin Mary)? I know it is not resolved. Is there a particular comfort in those figures? Are they a parody for you, or are they actually in your background:? Do they have another function, or is it in terms of the history of art that you are dealing with that piece?

JO: I thought more in the essence of the house again.

AUDIENCE: Is it a religious house?

JO: Yes. Before I talk about the house I want to say something about the little dragon (monster) (figure. 26) here. I thought of this in a religious context - Adam and Eve. During the show I had four apples under its feet. When I returned the next day the apples were gone. I assume someone had eaten them.

AUDIENCE: *Laughter.*

JO: *In returning to the house and the Virgin Mary (H. Bosch). Mary is, for me, yet another role model. She is in my head as another fragment.*

AUDIENCE: *All these people looking through these little cracks in the facade in certain ways . . . and, I was just curious, it is so consistent that I thought maybe . . . I did not want to miss . . . basically, is there something you might be experiencing through that piece? They are looking out and their heads are amputated all over the place, so it's a little different than I would understand the arrangement and why you put it together.*

JO: *Essentially that piece is not finished. I wanted this figure (cloaked figure without a face) to slide back and forth across the surface in front of the other figures (as if she is searching the men with the amputated heads. She moves horizontally, and looks at the Virgin Mary and at these male figures; they, in turn, look through the "window" of her empty face. Because her face is cut away, she lacks an identity. As she moves across these figures and they look out through her face, they give her their identity.).*

(In retrospect, the Bosch House, borrowed from Bosch's thirteenth century Epiphany, took a religious scene and translated it into a present day allegory. This was the last piece on which I worked for this show. At the time, I did not feel it had been resolved as an image; however, it was an important element in tying together some of my thoughts on feminine roles. Here, the Virgin, a vestige of a goddess, stands as a symbol for women's behavior. She is a good forgiving mother. She also has power over mortal man in the ability "given" her to pass on forgiveness for evil or bad behavior. She gives birth to martyrdom.

I feel her qualities have been passed down to me from Renaissance paintings. For example, I was expected to be the "forgiving person" in my family by both my husband and my children. In some instances this bordered on martyrdom, on my part, which made me feel very uncomfortable.

She was invented by man who gave her the responsibility for some of these outmoded behaviors. Because of this I chose to deconstruct the male image. I believe this was a reasonable reaction toward my struggle to achieve a breaking away from the feminine as depicted by men. I cut off their heads. They were then placed so they would look out into the installation at the other female characters. Symbolically, the figures in this piece, are asked to view the identity problems they helped to create.)

(In this same work I comment on the sequined shoes set on gold roller skates, positioned under

the Virgin Mary and the cloaked figure without a face): this morning I was thinking of putting a small picket fence around the shoes. When I looked at them they seemed so confined on their little stand. When I first thought about that piece, I wanted the roller skates to appear to be rolling with the high heeled shoes on top of them. This did not happen. Now, I see this speaks of confinement by the way the skates are placed. A picket fence around them may have clarified this statement. High heel shoes on skates also speak of instability, an out of balance situation (a place I find myself today when I think about letting go of tradition).

AUDIENCE: Jo, something I have not heard mention of is fun. I find a lot of fun in this room; and, what I hear is art and history and, "this is how I perceive the perception of women" and stuff like that . . . and I find that valid; but, I also find something else here. Maybe it is something that can't be talked about; but I find an imbalance just in the way it is being discussed. I find a side of you that I take very seriously. I take your fun side seriously because it seems very free. It seems very spontaneous; I missed that being talked about as a part of your show.

. . . There is another side beyond the theoretical, beyond the art history. . . . there's another level.

JO: I wanted this show to appear as humor and to be serious at the same time. If that's what you are getting from it then I hit my mark. Certain pieces were meant to look "funny" (fig. 2) (referring to the Boat People). For instance, the Statue of Liberty leading the charge out of town in a plastic boat that says "this is not to be used as a lifepreserving device", is, I feel, personally comparable. She has been the symbol (fig. 38) of "give me your poor and your ragged" for a long time. As a woman I have related to that statement. I have done that. I may have identified with her. I have had five children and even as they became older, adults, I had taken them and their friends into my home and my life in order to help them. This is why I identify with her. I held the torch and lit the way so to speak. But now, I show her as the gal in the front of the boat leading the charge (of other personas) out of town. This is comical in the way it is presented here, and yet is very serious in it's intentions.

(Where is she going?) I get into situations, positions without realizing what I am getting into

at the time (tradition again), and then it is hell trying to work my way out. The personas in the boat are carrying some of these situations: the stoicism of the Grant Wood caricature, the smiling Wonder Woman. Wonder Woman is the persona in this boat that I am most certain of. I do not aspire to be Wonder Woman anymore. I went through a part of my life trying to be everything: taking care of house, children, my landscape business, my art-life, money . . . I was so fragmented . . . trying to be too much (crazy). The Statue of Liberty is carrying some of my personas out (maybe she will dump them at sea and return for more of those I don't want).

(There are two Wonder Women in this installation: one in the boat with the Statue of Liberty, and a self-portrait placed on a remote controlled car (fig. 35). I drove this car so Wonder Woman could leave the installation area. That the model woman on the car, in my image, was able to escape from the other Lilliputian personas in the pink room, and her restricted role of femininity, gave me an enormous sense of relief. In leaving the inhuman requirements she had placed on herself, she said, "I am not all things and I am enough".¹⁰)

¹⁰ Maureen Murdock, The Heroines Journey (Shmbhala Publications, Inc., 1990), p. 69.

Jeff, Judy's Jeff, wrote a poem about my show.
I am not a reader of poetry; however, I want to
read it now . . . and hope I do it justice:

blazed pinks the walls
around marshmallow shag
porch swing cowboy
bric a brac construction
chicken saddle house
of cards collapsing
branches shadow tea cup
ladder green inflate
the sequined monster
face the famous shoes
the lady in the mirror

Jeff , "Jo's"

Actually there are two ladies in this mirror
(figs. 2,17,33,40). They are both borrowed from
Picasso. One is looking at herself and
simultaneously at the other (in the mirror). The
second is looking at her innards and screaming
outwardly.

The mirror itself was not planned to the point
of exactness. I knew I wanted a distorted
reflection of the House (figs. 4,20,40), and also,
a distorted image that reflected my feelings (about

the House and the inflatable figures). I wanted to show an outward and an inner identity at the same moment.

(Since feminine qualities were distorted to begin with, on the basis of male oriented art about women, these images depict the pain reflected in my identity as a woman. Distortion is a part of my being, reflected back to me. With this comes the cry that attempts to master the ensuing chaos; it is a way of hiding from one's self when recognizing one's own monsters.¹¹)

*. . . and, the pink dress (fig. 2,6) on the floor:
because I jumped out of it, Glinda is gone. The
Good Witch of the North is no more . . .*

¹¹ Donald Kuspit, The New Subjectivism: Art in the 1980's. (Ann Arbor Michigan: University Microfilms Inc., 1988), p. 90.

CONCLUSION

My thesis examines historical visuals as they pertain to me. They are transmitted into roles that I, as a woman, connected with; they became my myths from the past guised in present behaviors.

In it I had hoped to express meaning for both genders. In becoming connected to the work, everyone could become aware of ways in which they might have ascribed certain visual influences to their lives.

Borrowing from visuals of the past also allowed me to take an invented history, justified by a privileged few, and deconstruct it. As women we have been deprived of a history which belongs to us; and, that history needs to be reconstructed into a new version which makes sense in our present time.

The old story is over, and the myth of the heroic quest has taken a new turn on the evolutionary spiral. The quest for the "other" . . . is no longer genuine. That misguided quest has taken too much of a toll on the body/soul of woman.

Women today are acquiring the courage to express their vision, their strength to set limits, and the willingness to take responsibility for themselves and others in a new way. They are reminding people of their origins, the necessity to live mindfully, and their obligation to preserve life on earth.

We are pilgrim people . . .¹²

¹² Murdock, p. 185-86.

As I cut away at some of the bonds that hold me to the past, and reconstitute my visual history, I find some old stories to be over. Others, such as my new role as a widow, are just beginning. This will demand another look into the past to see what myths are there that need to be dispelled.

If I have learned anything from my thesis, it is that I needed to embrace the past and allow it to flow through me; in this way I could listen to myself, allow new ideas to surface and to see myself in a new way. For instance, as the thesis unfolded in the form of the little people and photo constructions, the work began to speak to me of other sources that make up my life. Yes, the diverse roles were there to ponder; but, there was also the stuff of romance, tragedy and comedy. These will always be; they are events I cannot escape.

In re-defining myself, hopefully I shared, with others, some of the parts of my life that drove me to creating this body of work.

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fig. 1



fig. 2



fig. 3



fig. 4



fig. 5

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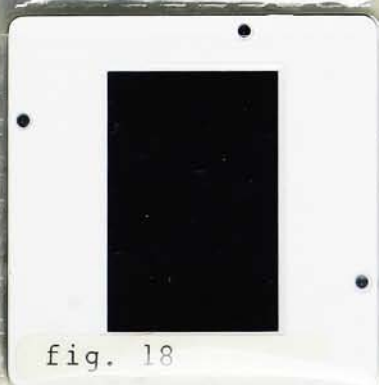
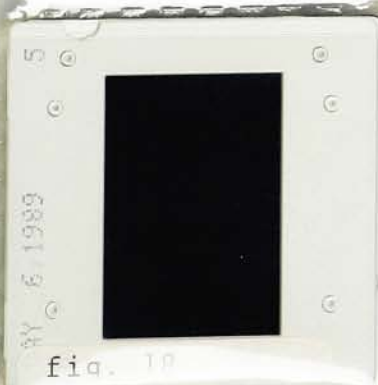
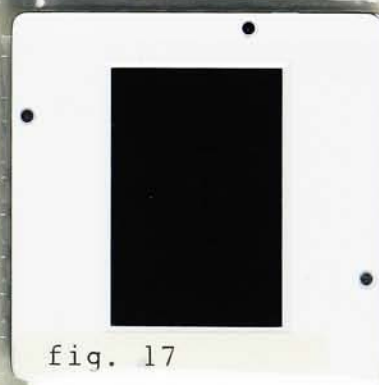
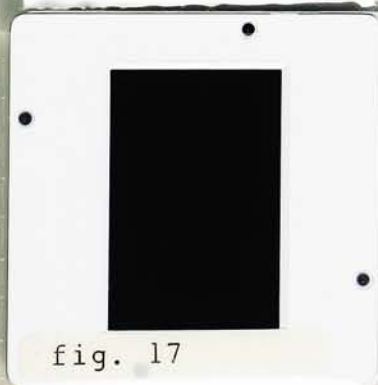
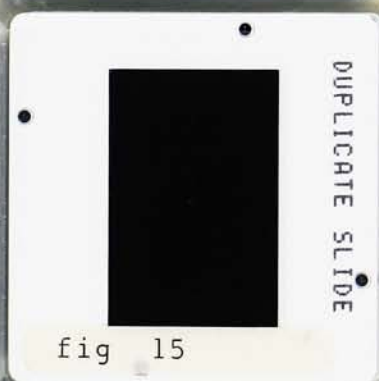
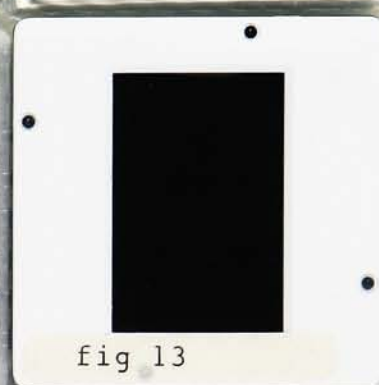




fig. 20



fig. 21

DUPLICATE SLIDE



fig. 22



fig 23

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fig. 23



fig. 24

DUPLICATE SLIDE



fig. 24

DUPLICATE SLIDE



fig. 25

DUPLICATE SLIDE



fig. 26

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fig. 27

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fig. 28



fig. 29



fig 30



fig. 31

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fig 32

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fig. 35

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fig. 34

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fig. 33

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fig. 38

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fig. 37

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fig. 36

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fig. 42

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fig. 41

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fig. 39

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fig. 43